Rover on Mars now picks its own laser targets

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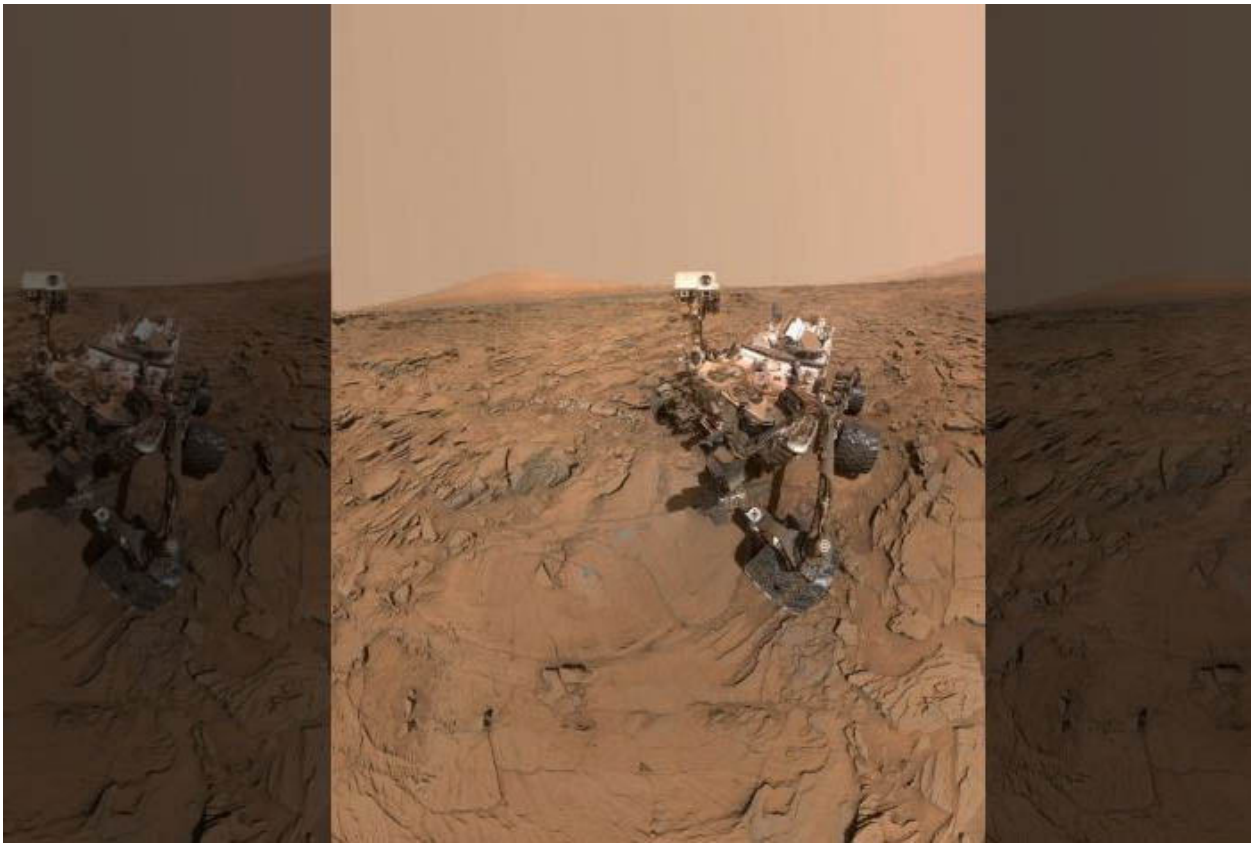

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If you find yourself on Mars anytime soon, beware: there's a rover exploring its surface, and it now has the ability to choose its own targets for its onboard laser—and even fire it autonomously.

The six-wheeled, nuclear-powered Curiosity has the laser to help it analyze the rocks it encounters on the red planet. As it fires, an instrument onboard the rover analyzes the wavelengths of the plasmas released from the targeted rock, and that lets scientists know what the rock is made of chemically.

The instrument is called ChemCam, and it was developed in part by the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. According to the lab, Curiosity now picks "multiple targets" on its own weekly. The rover has shot its laser over 350,000 times, and the rock samples can even be analyzed from as much as 23 feet away, Los Alamos says.

“This new capability will give us a chance to analyze even more rock and soil samples on Mars,” Roger Wiens, the principal investigator for ChemCam at Los Alamos, said in a statement. “The science team is not always available to pick samples for analysis. Having a smarter rover that can pick its own samples is completely in line with self-driving cars and other smart technologies being implemented on Earth.”

Read more at Fox News.

By Rob Verger - July 22, 2016.